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"And what rough beast its hour come round at last . . ."—*William Butler Yeats*

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Three Poems *by Thomas Merton*

FUGITIVE

Out in the green sun-dancing cane a mad half-Spaniard
Hiding, like a robber, from a coffee-drinking Judas,
Fears the newspaper owners
And the millionaires.

Planted, like bulbs, in the wet earth of sleep
His eyes had started to sprout:
Sea-changing in his murk of dreaming blood,
And shining in his fathoms of ambition,
Bones had begun to turn to money.

But now with secret agents out of mind
And mad sunstorm of parrots out of memory,
Beyond two miles of jungle,
He only sees the sweetly drumming sun.

And yet his waking memory, a murderous rooster,
Crested with a rag of meat,
Whirls its spurs in a cloud of magic feathers,
Braving the bread-colored dust.

But bamboo trees click in the wind like rosaries.
Charmed with watchfulness and thirst
His paper mask plays, (always), dead.

And in the priestly darkness of his love
Twenty prayers at once, to Saint Lazare,
Talk with tongues of candle-flame,

And one by one are folded up
The treacherous, fly-catching flowers of his will.

THE OHIO RIVER: LOUISVILLE

No one can hear the loud voice of the city
Because of the tremendous silence
Of this slow-moving river, quiet as space.

Not the towering bridge, the crawling train,
Not the knives of pylons
Clashing in the sun,
And not the sky-swung cables;
Not the outboard boat
Swearing in the fiery distance like a locust,
Not the iron cries of men:
Nothing is heard,
Only the immense and silent movement of the river.

The trains go through the summer quiet as paper,
And, in the powerhouse, the singing dynamos
Make no more noise than cotton.
All life is quieter than the weeds
On which lies lightly sprawling,
Like white birds shot to death,
The bathers' clothing.

But only where the swimmers float like alligators,
And with their eyes as dark as creosote
Scrutinize the murderous heat,
Only there is anything heard:
The thin, salt voice of violence,
That whines, like a mosquito, in their simmering blood.

AFTER THE NIGHT OFFICE: GETHSEMANI ABBEY

It is not yet the grey and frosty time
When barns ride out of the night like ships:
We do not see the Brothers, bearing lanterns,

Sink in the quiet mist,
As various as the spirits who, with lamps, are sent
To search our souls' Jerusalems
Until our houses are at rest
And minds enfold the Word, our Guest.

Praises and canticles anticipate
Each day the singing bells that wake the sun,
But now our psalmody is done.
Our hasting souls outstrip the day:
Now, before dawn, they have their noon.
The Truth that transubstantiates the body's night
Has made our minds His temple-tent:
Open the secret eye of faith
And drink these deeps of invisible light.

The weak walls
Of the world fall
And heaven, in floods, comes pouring in:
Sink from your shallows, soul, into eternity,
And slake your wonder at that deep-lake spring.
We touch the rays we cannot see,
We feel the light that seems to sing.

Go back to bed, red sun, you are too late,
And hide behind Mount Olivet—
For like the flying moon, held prisoner,
Within the branches of a juniper,
So in the cages of consciousness
The Dove of God is prisoner yet:
Unruly sun, go back to bed.

But now the lances of the morning
Fire all their gold against the steeple and the water-tower.
Returning to the windows of our deep abode of peace,
Emerging at our conscious doors
We find our souls all soaked in grace, like Gideon's fleece.

The Art of Wilde's Criticism

by Edouard Roditi

An artist who is as concerned as Oscar Wilde was with the purposes and devices of his art, with its ends and means, must demonstrate his aesthetic beliefs very frequently and not always directly. The very form or structure of some of his works may illustrate them, while the characters of other works may expound them as other characters expound beliefs that their author rejects. Critical theory can thus be distilled from almost any example of his creative art as well as from the contents of his more directly critical works.

Most of Wilde's creative works can be analyzed, to some extent, as critical works: Lord Henry, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* expounds very much the same doctrines of art and of life as Ernest in the critical dialogue on *The Critic as Artist;* and Lord Goring, in *An Ideal Husband,* illustrates, though satirically, the same opinions and tastes, those of the ideal dandy. Wilde found illustrations to his own tastes and beliefs even in real life: in *Pen, Pencil, and Poison,* an essay on Thomas Griffiths, we discover curious analogies between Wainewright, the essayist, painter and poisoner who was a friend of Charles Lamb, and Wilde's Dorian Gray. The historical character and the fictional hero both exercised a "strange fascination" on all who met them, each young dandy "sought to be somebody, rather than to do something," both "recognised that Life itself is an art, and has its modes of style no less than the arts that seek to express it," both collected more or less the same precious coins, antique

gems, cameos and other knick-knacks, and both come to grief, by way of crime, when they abandon their dispassionate dandyism and allow themselves to be dominated by their passions, greed or self-love.

But many of the appreciations and critical views that are scattered throughout Wilde's poetry, drama and fiction have generally been restated in a more organized form in his critical dialogues, *The Decay of Lying* and *The Critic as Artist.* And the preliminary observations for these more formal discussions of artistic problems are to a great extent available in Wilde's more important essays, in *The Truth of Masks, Pen, Pencil, and Poison, The Soul of Man Under Socialism* or *The Rise of Historical Criticism,* as well as in his many book reviews and other occasional writings where, though often discussing works that are of little interest or importance to us today, he constantly uses his ephemeral topics as illustrations of the philosophy of art and of life that was his permanent concern.

Wilde's book reviews express the same admirations, for Balzac or Meredith, for instance, as his dialogues, and decry the same propagandistic aspects of the realist novel whose object "is not to give pleasure to the artistic instinct, but rather to vividly portray life for us, to draw attention to social anomalies and social forms of injustice." And much that Wilde wrote hastily in his reviews of forgotten poets of the 'Eighties is still so true that it applies to a Benét or a MacLeish in our own day: "It is always a pleasure to come across an American poet who is not national, and who tries to give expression to the literature that he loves rather than to the land in which he lives. The muses care so little for geography!"

In his mature critical writings, Wilde seems to have aimed very carefully at a consistent doctrine of art, and to have contradicted himself, except in paradoxes, only inadvertently and in rare moments of carelessness. In *Shakespeare on Scenery,* a relatively unimportant article published in *The Dramatic Review,* Wilde states, for instance, that it is impossible to read Shakespeare "without seeing that he is constantly protesting against the

two special limitations of the Elizabethan stage—the lack of suitable scenery and the fashion of men playing women's parts." Though the latter contradicts the theory expounded with such relish in *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, where Wilde ambiguously suggests that love for a boy-actor inspired many of the beauties of Shakespeare's plays, the article's main argument, an analysis of Shakespeare's verbal description of settings as a substitute for the visual appeal of scenery, corroborates Wilde's other analysis, in *The Truth of Masks*, of Shakespeare's descriptive joy in details of costume.

Such inconsistencies are indeed very minor, of an accidental rather than of a substantial nature, in the appreciation of objects of value rather than in the elucidation of values according to which they are to be appreciated. In Wilde's discussion of these values or standards, on the contrary, one observes a constant and consistent development. In his politics, for instance, he was at first an ardent Ruskinian Socialist, with all the naïveté of Romantic idealism, from his Oxford years until he chanced to review, in 1890, a translation of the works of a Chinese Taoist anarchist: *Chuang Tzu, Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer.* Wilde's socialism was then refined and enriched, as a philosophy, until the politics of *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, already more sophisticated than his earlier beliefs, finally became, in the second part of *The Critic as Artist*, a consciously Taoist anarchism of inaction.

Though Wilde's opinions and tastes constantly changed as he learned to appreciate more varied or subtle types or styles of thought and art, and though his skill and elegance as a critical writer improved with practice, his fundamental principles remained substantially the same, from his early writings, such as *On the Rise of Historical Criticism*, to his mature dialogues. Wilde believed, for instance, that the purpose of art was to delight rather than to inform or to propagandize: "The aim of most of our modern novelists seems to be, not to write good novels, but to write novels that will do good. They wish to reform the morals, rather than to portray the manners of their age. They have

made the novel the mode of propaganda." He believed indeed that "the supreme advantage that fiction posesses over fact" was that "it can make things artistically probable; can call for imaginative and realistic credence; can, by force of mere style, compel us to believe." And because most Nineteenth-century novelists neglected this force of sheer style and imagination, Wilde deplored the decay of lying, of the ability to create what Plato called myths.

As Wilde himself learned to use with greater skill the devices of this art of mythopoeia, he developed more complex and convincing forms for his critical writings, until they became as fictional, in some respects, as his stories and plays, deriving much of their persuasiveness from the immediately dramatic qualities of their plot or dialogue form. In his early essay *On the Rise of Historical Criticism,* Wilde did not hesitate, for instance, to stress the stages of his argument by resorting to cumbersome outlining devices: "Having now traced the progress of historical criticism in the special treatment of myth and legend, I shall proceed to investigate the form in which the same spirit manifested itself as regards what one may term secular history . . ." In *The Truth of Masks* too, he points out the dialectically ambiguous nature of his argument in an oddly appended conclusion which has little to do with the essay's topic but treats the essay itself as its topic. In the dialogue entitled *The Decay of Lying,* however, Vivian reads to Cyril his article on the decay of lying, and discusses it with him in dramatic form; Cyril is then convinced by the mythopoeic quality of the essay and by the gist of the discussion in which he participates, and the reader shares the conviction of this unreal character who, thanks to a trick of artistic perspective similar to that of the play within the play in *Hamlet,* communicates some of his reality and of the reader's own reality to the essay itself, to the argument within the argument of the dialogue. Within the fictional frame-work of *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* the ambiguity of Wilde's theory concerning Shakespeare's sonnets likewise pervades the whole story and is brought out much more immediately, by devices of plot, than the ambiguity

of *The Truth of Masks.* These two examples of the loftily creative art of the critic are as illustratively convincing as any argument in Wilde's other dialogue, *The Critic as Artist,* though the latter's dramatic form and argument and one character, Gilbert, mediate constantly between the reader and the other character, Ernest, as Gilbert's objections to Wilde's argument, expounded by Ernest, are voiced one after the other and disposed of by Ernest until Gilbert and the reader are simultaneously convinced by Ernest and by Wilde.

In *The Critic as Artist,* however, the argument is perhaps too long and complex to be successfully expounded and discussed in a dialogue which has but two participants. A more experienced dialectician and craftsman in this dramatic art of exposition would have presented his material with a greater number of participants; and this would have enhanced the mythopoeic quality of the fictional form and strengthened its devices by varying the points of view of the objections raised and refuted, so that the argument's verisimilitude would have been greater in the eyes of readers whose points of view vary and whose objections may not all be voiced by Wilde's one character and disposed of by the other.

Wilde believed that the aim of the artist or "liar" is "simply to charm, to delight, to give pleasure," and frequently dismissed as merely "tedious" or "a bore" all art that failed to delight him. It would therefore seem legitimate to suggest that *On the Rise of Historical Criticism,* in spite of its brilliant and exact distinctions between the philosophy of history of Herodotus and that of Thucydides, and in spite of its many excellent insights into historiography, is rather "a bore," for lack of sheer elegance or artistic form and of persuasive mythopoeia in its cumbersomely and compulsively argumentative periods: "Besides, Herodotus, I may remark, had he reflected on the meaning of that Athenian law, which, while prohibiting marriage with a uterine sister, permitted it with a sister-germane, or, on the common tradition in Athens that before the time of Cecrops children always bore their mothers' names, or, on some of the Spartan regulations, he

could hardly have failed to see the universality of kinsmanship through women in early days, and the late appearance of monandry." According to the same hedonistic standards, one might likewise find *The Truth of Masks*, brilliant and delightful as it is, more "tedious" than *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*; and *The Critic as Artist* might, for the same reasons, seem "tedious" to more readers than *The Decay of Lying*. The proof of art, according to Wilde's theory, would indeed lie, as in Salvador Dali's theory of "comestible" art, in the "eating"; and more readers will be delighted by *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* than by *The Truth of Masks*, or by *The Decay of Lying* than by *The Critic as Artist*.

Not that the topics of *The Truth of Masks* or of *The Critic as Artist* are in themselves at all "tedious." *The Truth of Masks* is as entertaining, and as well documented and ingeniously organized, as many an essay by a critic generally considered great, such as Hazlitt or T. S. Eliot. But Wilde had found, for *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, a new form which allowed him to discuss such material with additional delight for readers of essays, and which might even delight many readers of fiction who do not derive, in general, much pleasure from essays. The story's formal perfection, though no greater, is thus of a creatively higher order than that of the essay. And as for *The Critic as Artist*, which presents Wilde's philosophy of art and of life as a whole, its contents should be far more interesting than those of *The Decay of Lying* or of any of Wilde's other critical works; but the form of this dialogue is not as ingeniously adjusted to these contents as that of *The Decay of Lying*, so that the discussion lacks, at times, dramatic verisimilitude and tension. The whole dialogue indeed tends to lapse, for lack of more participants or more varied points of view, into long monologues whose form is that of separate lectures or essays and whose various parts, as one reads, seem more closely integrated into each monologue than into the dialogue as a whole.

"Socrates questioned, but did not answer; for he pretended not to know," wrote Aristotle, anaylzing the Socratic method as it is illustrated in the Platonic dialogues. And throughout Plato's

many dialogues, Socrates rarely expresses any opinion of his own but generally forces the other participants to formulate and then, in discussion, to correct their own latent beliefs. With but two participants, Wilde finds himself involved, in his two dialogues, in expounding his own philosophy in the words of one participant, who acts as "magister," which is what Plato generally avoided, while the other participant listens most of the time as a mere "discipulus." Wilde's philosopher thus tends to lecture, as the master does in the dialogues of the *Upanishads* or as the Gautama Buddha does in the ancient Indian dialogues, more often than he forces his listener, by dialectical questioning, to formulate and modify his opinions. And besides presenting but one disciple to mediate between the master and the reader, Wilde does not make this master, as Socrates does in those Platonic dialogues which have but two participants, reveal "many faces" so as to vary his point of view. The dialectical structure of Wilde's dialogues thus tends to follow the pattern of the neo-Platonic dialogues of late antiquity or of the early Renaissance, those of Saint Augustine or of Leone Ebreo, rather than the more complex patterns of the Platonic dialogues. And Wilde is unable to correct more than one wrong attitude of his disciple towards his topic, whereas Plato, even in a dialogue such as the *Cratylus*, whose dramatic structure is relatively simple, could modify two opposed and equally exaggerated views, and in other dialogues correct even more than two such views.

Nor is there any greater similarity, in their structure, between Wilde's dialogues and those of *Il Cortegiano*, which is, in the literature of Humanism, to the dialogues of Plato what the neo-classical tragedy of Racine is to ancient tragedy. The participants in Baldassare Castiglione's discussions are drawn from real life, as were those of Plato, so that the dialectic of *Il Cortegiano* is rendered more complex by the contrasts and conflicts between its various characters, whereas Wilde's characters, if at all delineated, are all very much alike, save in their opinions. Whether as fiction or as drama, Wilde's dialogues indeed reveal their author's ideal world, as opposed to the merely idealized world

of his stories or his novel, and to the caricature of his ideals which is revealed in the world of the comedies. There is no plot or action, in these dialogues, save those of philosophical discussion, though *The Critic as Artist* is divided into two parts by a purely conventional device of plot when Ernest and Gilbert interrupt their discussion to partake of a supper of "delightful" ortolans and "perfect" Chambertin, and though evening falls at the end of one dialogue and dawn rises at the end of the other. Significantly, two of the four citizens of Wilde's ideal world of the future, Cyril and Vivian in *The Decay of Lying*, bear the names of the author's own children, as if to express a pious hope of a more perfect future; and, though the masters of both dialogues expound more or less the same doctrines as Lord Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, their disciples, unlike Dorian, are not led thereby to discover any narcissistic and evil elements in their nature, nor inspired, through knowing themselves, to be themselves in self-indulgence, crime and all the other corrupting realms of action. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry practices his own doctrine of inaction and does not approve of Dorian's falling in love; but, had not Dorian been one of those whom Vivian, Lord Henry's counterpart in *The Decay of Lying*, calls "the tedious people who carry out their principles to the bitter end of action," there would have been no action and no plot to Wilde's parable of the fallen dandy who is not enough of a "tired hedonist" and is still "too fond" of his pleasures.

Wilde's stories, his novel and his plays illustrate moreover the need for plot and action in a world which, however idealized, still imitated the world as the author knew it, rather than as he would like it to be; and here the author was forced to let his philosophical dandies become infected, as their clay feet trod the soil of action, with the corruption of this real world. But the dialogues imitate Wilde's ideal world of pure speculation where no action is necessary, his heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, where a Lord Henry may instruct a Dorian without the latter's debasing the dandy's saintly philosophy of art and of life in self-indulgence, where there are no women to tempt the hero

into the selfishness that is his punishment for abandoning in action the arduous task of self-perfecting contemplation.

In Wilde's "New Hellenism," which he defined in *The Soul of Man under Socialism* as "the new Individualism," action stands where knowledge stood in the ancient "Hellenism" that Wilde imitated. Our civilization, with its ethical pragmatism and its stress on progress and production, estimates action as the ancients once valued knowledge; and Wilde set himself the task, as a new Socratic, to point out that all action can be the cause whence evil effects spring, as in his prose poem *The Doer of Good,* and that the only absolutely good action is thus inaction; much as Socrates once tanght that no knowledge is identical with wisdom or truth, and that a knowledge of the limitations of our knowledge is paradoxically the only wisdom that man can attain. The pursuit of wisdom is thus more important than any one of the knowledges that we may acquire in this pursuit, and the infinite task of self-perfection more valuable than any good actions that we may perform in the momentary belief that we have attained this perfection.

Though Socratic in the negative and even aporetic character of its dialectic as it contradicts so many of the popular beliefs and prejudices of its age, Wilde's thought is not Socratic in the structure of the dialogues themselves. The *Magister,* in both dialogues, relies more on lyrical or rhetorical devices of persuasion than on intellectual or dialectical devices, and the various parts or lectures, where he expounds his philosophy between the disciple's brief interruptions, are Augustinian in form and related to the whole dialogue too loosely; the long lyrical or rhetorical passages of Senecan tragedy are similarly related more loosely to the whole drama than are the parts of a Sophoclean tragedy, whose more closely-knit structure is analogous to that of a Platonic dialogue. And as Wilde failed to keep the dialogue's characteristic aim constantly in view but allowed himself to be carried away, in each part of it, by the pyrotechnic brilliance of set speeches, so too he was sometimes led into unnecessary contradictions and was not always conscious of their full implications.

In the beginning of *The Decay of Lying*, for instance, Vivian declares that "people tell us that Art makes us love Nature more than we loved her before"; his own experience, however, is that "the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature," and that "what Art reveals to us is Nature's lack of design." But he also declares later that Nature "quickens to life" only "in our brain," that "things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us"; and Wilde then goes on to point out that, "at present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects," though "there may have been fogs for centuries in London." But is not all this a proof of the doctrine that Vivian first set out to disprove, according to which, "after a careful study of Corot and Constable," we see things in Nature "that had escaped our observation"? Vivian had indeed protested that only "the dullard and the doctrinaire" want to be consistent; but in a dialectical discussion, inconsistencies of this sort tend to obscure or pervert the aim of the argument, unless they are resolved into conscious paradox. And it was, among other reasons, to avoid this apparent aimlessness of the rhetorical sophist who is carried away by his own brilliance, that the Platonic Socrates, in general, refrained from expounding his own views and more often forced his listeners first to formulate and then to correct their views.

Oscar Wilde's critical writings illustrate a rare devotion to art, that of the saint to his religion, as Baudelaire described it, or of the soldier to his cause. Not content with expressing his philosophy of art and of life, Wilde sought to present it in a worthy and beautiful form. And if he failed to achieve perfection in the dialogue, the most perfect form for philosophical discussion, he at least, by imitating the more perfect models of antiquity, revived this form from the decadence into which it had fallen; in the *Imaginary Conversations* of a Lucian, a Fontenelle or a Landor, purple passages of wit or of archaeological learning had taken the place of the philosophical lectures into which, in neo-Platonic writings, the Platonic dialectic had already degenerated.

Regressing towards lost perfection, Wilde went but half the way, which was already further than most of those who, at various times, have sought to revive the glory that was Greece. And he seems, moreover, to have been obscurely aware of the weaknesses of his own dialectic; for he felt that it was necessary to recapitulate the master's doctrine towards the end of each dialogue, lest the disciple or the reader, confused by the complexity of a discussion whose tactics had more often been those of rhetorical debating than of dialectical elucidation, forget the points on which agreement had been reached. In a truly Socratic or a perfect Freudian analysis, no such confusion can subsist, and no recapitulation is ever necessary.

Oscar Wilde's failure to achieve his high aim, in his dialogues as in other writings where he emulated classical models, can in general be attributed to the vague nature of the concept of form in his philosophy of art. In the somewhat neo-Platonic theories of art which were propounded, throughout the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, by the hierophants of "Art for art's sake," the sublime occupied very much the same position as the concept of grace in the scholastic systems of an earlier age. The artist, being one of "the elect," was relieved of much of the responsibility of "works," of the toil of laborious construction. Mere expression, in the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce, who later tried to organize this whole philosophy in a *Summa*, created the basic form of a work of art; the rest was polish, superficial ornament, style. In his critical writings, Wilde repeatedly states that form is "the beginning of things" and "everything"; but he identifies form with style rather than with structure, and affirms that "nothing but style" can make us believe a thing, and that style is also "everything." In discussing the novels of Tourguenieff, Wilde identifies style as a "spirit of exquisite selection" and a "delicate choice of detail"; in discussing the form of Pater's prose, he speaks of its "subtle perfection." Evanescent and almost indefinable, form has thus ceased, hypostatized by the sublime, to be anything as definable as structure, which may not be immediately apparent and often demands detailed analysis; instead, it has be-

come an immediately expressed and immediately perceptible beauty, a mystic communion through expression and impression. But the most complex forms of Western literature and thought, tragedy which purges the passions and the philosophical dialogue which purges the intellect, must rely, for their perfection, on a form that is more carefully and curiously devised, on a structure that is neither immediately expressed nor immediately apparent, a beauty more substantial than polish, ornament or style.

NOTE: As a chapter from a book on Wilde as a "maker of modern literature," the present essay discusses principally the form or structure of his critical works; their content and opinions are the subject of other discussions, of Wilde's politics, ethics and aesthetics.

In the Circle of the Family

by George Stiles

ALTHOUGH all that morning he and Young Gano had roamed wildly all over the land and together had examined every spot of ground with the most sober suspicions, they had been perhaps too young or too inexperienced to discover any Indians. Now, with his disappointment cruelly coloring his long walk, Noah started home alone, to emerge from a scrub like a defiant marauder, his features stained with the jelly of leaves. His father was standing up to his belt buckle among the pine rails of the fence and he looked startled at Noah and then cross. His face grew serious and blue as he leaned abruptly to recover a knife and some splices of string that he had been using to bind up a couple of weak stalks in the garden. The tip of his blade was fat with soil.

Noah went past him in silence and as he opened the door, almost rudely, the interior dimness welled out to meet him. The opening led back into a deep hallway. From its far end, where the telephone was, his mother's voice pulsed through the stillness. "Noah? Close the door—shut it after you—please, dear—" and so he, going out at once again part of the way, obediently slid the knob inward. His father now was standing erect and looking away from the gate post, his cupped palm clasping the back of his neck. Noah came in then but did not see or immediately hear his mother; her presence though had attached itself to every object. But her tones soon mounted guardedly and he could tell that she was still at the instrument. Her voice fell so gently she might have been speaking through the petals of a rose.

He loitered, moved by it to novel excitement, listening as outside a door: to his mother's words only though not her conversation, for that was restricted and alien. Ena had come down from upstairs and fell upon him nearly, he was that quiet. "You so good and quiet." Ena let her keys ring subtly like coins and tightly held to the linen that was doubled across one deep brown arm. Across her mouth the lines were visible, but not smiling ones, Noah saw. She raised his face and dipped a thumb into his skin. "Are you bleedin'?" And she rubbed at that spot until his whole cheek burned unnecessarily. "It not bleedin'," said Ena. "You do needs a wash. You go run right up and wash for your brother—he here."

But he almost yipped. "Val—." What did she mean? "What do you mean Val is here?" For of course he knew this.

His sister, on the third step behind Ena and looking tall for that reason, commanded: "Hush. It's Val's twin. She means Val's twin is home. Hush." Noah was that stunned by the information that he scarcely noted Ena departing. His voice spiraled up to an obedient whisper. "Katie." "Don't call me that," she rapped back at once, warning him and whispering, too. "But who—?" he said, bewildered and urgent. "How? How Kit?" But his sister's attempt to seem knowing was a distressing failure. "He's a twin," she said, making it a little chant. "He looks exactly like Val. And they're *i*-dentical, Ena says." Suddenly Noah wearied of looking up at her; he reached and pulled her down to him; she grew tiny at once.

"Did you know?" he whispered, huskily. "Kit, did you—did you know?" "I absolutely knew," she boasted. "What—? What did you know?" At this she wavered. "That he—he's a twin. Ssh." "*When?*" "Why Noah, they're always *been*—" "I mean when did you *know?*" "Why," his young sister, Kit, started in to say, but she yelled at the top of her breath: "Why are you always —oh, you make me so tired—."

Then their mother said, from her end of the hallway, "Noah, what is it?"

Both at once turned toward the sound of her voice. Noah saw

her form reflected in the mirror fastened to the panel beyond and as he looked on, silently, it rose and merged, unsubstantial as smoke, into the pervading dimness. A flame pulsed but retreated; but they had glimpsed her features more intimately then, owing to the intervening gleam. She rarely lighted a cigarette in front of either of her two young and they understood that she must be disturbed. Kit climbed back to the stairs and folded her hands ceremoniously; she looked to be hastening the process of reserve like some terrifyingly serious little lady. She seemed too tolerant besides of the faint bluish welter that was so much higher than her head and still circling upward. It was otherwise with Noah below. He was dashed but showed it.

"Hello dear," his mother now greeted, easily, "did you come across any Indians?" Noah was hurt, because he suspected her of being privately amused, as his sister was openly.

He shunted all that to one side. "No," he said, adding: "No Indians." But as she would have, at this, displayed a fraudulent sympathy, he sturdily withstood it, dug both his heels into the polished floor and curtly questioned her about Val's twin. "See here, mother, what about Val's twin?"

His mother touched his hair with the tips of her fingers. "Oh yes." She appeared tired or absent. "Oh yes, I truly did mean to—I—. Kit," she went on, "Kit can tell you."

This he could scarcely endure, the thought of his sister in possession of information that he had himself been denied: *Kit*, and nearly a good year younger. His mother's idle reference to Indians, coinciding the way it had with the presence of a brother whose name he did not so much as know, had started a process that was all but already out of control. He was also somewhat bitterly knowing as to why Val had been the one to suggest the day's unprofitable adventure. "Oh, I see," he yelled, his thoughts boiling. "Can't I *tell?*" His sudden sourness escaping, "*Can't* I?"

His mother opened the door and flung her live cigarette out on the cinder path, as if disappointed in its taste. When she turned back to them again her tones were distant and nice. "It is my fault, dear, mine and—." She glanced up, as if toward the ceil-

ing, but studied the daylight mildly fading. "I know well enough what's mine—my fault," she iterated. And she finished ironically: "Not too many questions now, dear—not all at once." Her tones were abruptly crushed by the rude shock arising out of the quarries where laborers continually were blasting, the sound very near but dulled. This was followed by another, a heavier unexpected noise that came up trailing a string of parasite echoes, like the loud pop of snappish guns.

Noah had been hearing it like thunder all through the day, along with his friend, Gano, who was fragile and younger than Noah by as much as two months, (which surprised everyone, for no one took him for nine). Everybody fell rather too indulgently into the habit of saying *Young* Gano and regarding him in a special sense, with a kind of ardor to be appropriate.

At his mother's side, assailed by all that was loving and familiar about her protective presence, Noah's remembrance of his friend he discovered to be partial and hazy.

It was as though Gano's features had dwindled away into neutral areas, where all Noah's efforts earnestly to assemble them were being intercepted by something profound as an ache. In part, too, this was because Young Gano had no mother. His only intimate relation was a sister, a nun, whom he scarcely ever saw, living alone as he did, or nearly, in a doomed house with an aunt and a woman that was his old aunt's old companion.

A young man coming downstairs was carrying Silas, who was growling and cunningly showing his teeth but not as if he had intentions to use them. Noah glanced up warily. The stranger that he saw looked almost too much like Val, his brother, though heavier and, to a subtle degree, odd. Even the way he had of holding Silas stamped him as somebody other than Val, to the dog's discomfort, for he was fretting, quite wretchedly anxious, it appeared, to free himself from that frosty grip. But the placid intruder neither displayed sympathy nor human emotion. He passed Kit without coming into contact with her. In the same way he would have gone around Noah and his patient mother but he was almost forcibly blocked by their presence.

Noah looked clearly and at some length into the twin's dispassionate face.

"This," said his mother, touching an arm, plucking the flesh a little teasingly, just as if, he thought in despair, she scandalously enjoyed the circumstance, "this is Val—Val's twin—Edward. Dear, this is your brother Edward." He said nothing while waiting for the new Edward to acknowledge the novel relationship. But the stranger that looked so like Val simply stood beside him here in the hallway and stroked Silas with his pure white palms. All of them stood without shifting from the one position, then the door opened as of itself, outward, and Noah regarded his father's form swaying in front of the deadening light. Appearing extravagantly large among them all, he searched their almost hidden faces and although he directed nothing toward anybody else, his greeting, no doubt to Edward alone of them, sounded fiercely genial. "Why," their father said, with the dimness stopping up a fraction of his painful smile, "how have you and ol' Silas here been matching it?" Rarely had Noah heard his father so uproarious and he glanced furtively over at his mother but she was complacently smiling. His sister had been entirely crowded out of view by Edward's fattish body. Kit was somewhere beyond him and positively quiet.

Silas was still maneuvering to escape from Edward's imprisoning arms. Now he lurched free and raked across the oiled floor on his nails, pointing his direction toward the half-open door. Like a dervish Edward followed him out. Kit raced for it and held the door for her father and mother, then as she went outside after them she absently banged it shut. Alone there, with early twilight streaking the hall around him, Noah stalled, listening to the mawkish barking of Silas. Ena came and discovered him without difficulty waiting in the gloom. The maid questioned, "Where your mama and the boy, Noah?" And before he could even answer her she had fingered the button above him on the wall; its light spilled disagreeably into his face. "You go ahead up now and wash," Ena said again, and she was disgusted, "'cause you been long 'nough lookin' like this any how. You go

up—heah—and scrap' yourself clean—and good and clean." She loitered there, too, to make sure he mounted the stairs promptly to the upper floor.

The bathroom was fastened as if from the inside but Noah clawed at the knob and when the door came open he saw Val standing there looking down at him with a curious expression. He had not seen him in uniform before; his brother was wearing it now, everything but the neat jacket that was hanging from a hook on the wall. The hot water was racing into the bowl and steaming agreeably. Val had been shaving and though his face was dry his nice fair skin smelled of soap. He was squinting his eyes a little, because of the uncovered electric bulb. The luminous light was changing in their depths.

"Hello," said Val and innocently fitted himself into his jacket. It was startling to compare him with the unamiable Edward. But to Noah the twins were not alike at all. Rather churlishly he went in past him. "We never found anything," he replied, leaning and hunching his sharp shoulders over the washbowl, at the same time straining a little boyishly on his toes. "We were all over the Range." "Who?" asked Val. He still seemed quietly perplexed and rather deep. "We—Young Gano and—*we* were." "Ah," Val interrupted. This manner of Val's was irksome to Noah. "*You* said—" He let suds fill in the white hollow of the basin. He watched them, for an instant taken. The clear swift water raced after them down the drain. "Yes," answered Val. "What were you after?" "Indian forts." Noah's dismayed response made his voice sound stunted. "Why you remember you said—" But Val, he at once saw, didn't recall, because he had completely forgotten it. "Yes," replied his brother, absently. "I'm sorry." Then he went out toward the stairs like a person who abruptly decides to be in a hurry.

They were all gathered outside on the steps watching Silas and Edward gallop frenziedly in the half light; when Noah came down he found them here with white fixed unnatural grins stiffening their faces. Val's twin was racing forward and back across the turf, savagely darting out from the end of the house

and bearing toward Silas like something impossibly destructive. The creature would crouch down on the cinders as though in a cramp, his plump belly raking the ground like a brush. The stuttering barks that came up into his throat disintegrated there, or merged into some other sound; moans which assailed the ear piteously, and low, quailing whistles. Edward's charge was merciless and crushing, he looked frightening as he rushed over the ground, his expression unchanging and single-minded, with eyes cold and slightly crazed from his unrelieved exertion. Silas was a little mad as well. He would start up writhing when Edward pressed him closely, then rush off, his joints protruding as humps between which his coat quivered, riffled by the motor action of his muscles. Silas nodded his clownish head over and over many times, rooting at the cinders with his legs and shaking out the old spent tail that frittered, loose as a rope, behind him. He was very obsequious, too, to the ferocious twin, lifting a paw to stroke the leather of Edward's shoe, as if supposing this to be the function of the vanquished. Edward was just as morbidly intent upon the creature at his feet. He stooped to poke at Silas's body with the heel of a palm, experimentally, he was studying the dog's wearied reflexes and gazing down stonily into the meek depths. Then everybody laughed at once, stiffly, and all moved back inside.

The whole house, with the exception of the dining room, was unlighted, but Ena had efficiently gathered around her several large lamps, arranging these in such fashion that one became aware, upon entering, of a festive brightness which fell like tinted leaves all across the wide table. As Noah awkwardly hesitated at the side of his chair, his mother conferred fluently, in low tones, with the maid. He sat down since everybody else was seated and watchful, save Val's twin. Edward was not accounted for. Val himself got out of his place and walked round the table, holding his head to one side just as if he were using his ears as receptors for some ulterior purpose of his own. His mother appeared to observe his activity with quiet resentfulness. After a little Val had detected this, too, and so went humbly back to his

chair alongside Kit, where he remained uselessly plucking at the curly edges of his napkin.

Noah had immediately taken up his spoon when he noticed that his mother and father were gazing helplessly down at the food that Ena had placed in front of them silently as ever. He locked his fingers instead and endured the disturbing stillness for as long as he could. It was cut into by a door's rude slam. His father made a dry noise in his throat, then started at once to talk, peering round the table and accompanying his tones with the neutral music of the silver which he would take up and balance in his apt surgeon's palm, as he often must have weighed the artful scalpel before icily turning its steel against the stricken tissue. Noah was attentive, precisely as though he knew all about everything. Kit appeared intent as everybody and had a clear little smile stamped across her mouth, her fine teeth exhibited, as in a frame. Yet in studying her expression he was able to see that her eyes were too bright and her lips so evenly parted he was convinced of its fraudulence at once.

The lights over the table swooped electrically and wavered like a flame beset by a breeze, then settled again into impervious brilliance. This was not alarming but the noises that followed did seem to be and everyone reacted immediately to them, except Kit. Ena came in directly from the kitchen handling an absurd potato knife. Her palms were dripping and she went out all alone to the foot of the stairs drying them in her apron. Noah was behind her but his father overtook them both, looking odd as he ran. The sounds from above extended deepened, a duet of shrieks enclosed in a rumble of thunder. "That ol' Silas?" Ena demanded, over her own breathing. "He bein' assass'nated."

Noah reached the very top of the stairs ahead of either his mother or Val but waited as his father ran with short stabs of his blunt legs into the one room on the floor that showed a light and from where the terrifying noises were flung forth in a shower like an engine turned skittishly loose. All their forms looked alike in the dim colors of the hall. Shadows were drawn as if startled from private niches and he made out one of them as being his mother.

She stayed forlorn and neutral upon the threshold while Val and his father went inside to where Edward was standing in the exact center of the rug's queer patterns. His back was to the doorway and his shoulders worked curiously, as though he were weeping or laughing. The twin was doing neither of these but his actions were odd, for he was holding the vacuum cleaner in front of him like some terrible nightmare of a weapon, its motor brutishly running and with the creature, Silas, a prisoner in a corner of the room. The combination of sound was stunning. For what seemed to Noah to be an interminable duration Val's twin crouched over this crazy contrivance, sighting along its distended belly at the old dog circling cravenly and licking at his shadow beside him on the wall, looking woundedly out from his trap and setting up frightful cries, his jaws a trifle thickened through fear of disaster and the bands in his throat drawn taut like stretched rubbers. Silas's pupils were wet and limned with the markings of tiny red veins. He had changed much in a few hours.

Edward there, glancing up from his corraled victim, discovered the others behind him in the doorway. His face, like a discarded mask of Val's, was puffed from excitement and his chest throbbed in unison with the motor movement that charged through his wrists and shook his body like a leaf. The mechanism shot from his loosening clasp, squirmed on the end of its winding tail and snarled at his ankles like something alive. The twin stared down in unbelief at its motions and started in to giggle, the noise frail as a baby hic of terror and dismay. And Noah underwent shame, hearing this, but seeing instead of Edward, Val, his brother, crouched here before all of them, a fleck of idiocy starring his lips. Then he looked toward his mother, where her face was almost hid by the dark tints of the panel that she had leaned against. As she turned with a writhing movement of her shoulders he followed her out and pursued her downstairs, his heart sliding drunkenly in his breast. Noah had not expected her to leave the house and in the hallway hesitated, listening to her stiffening footsteps on the cinders. He threw open the door. "Mother—?" The hinges set up an answering fuss. Possibly he

only imagined this because the stillness was all at once very strict.

Night had not yet come over the Range. The stars were palely indicated in the places they all the time occupied. Textures of light were distributed among the clouds like hills and about the Range colors were dying, dropping away out of sight, or vanishing warily or falling like the chaff from trees, filling in the meticulous spaces that the used-up daylight was elaborately being weaned from, as darkness had its way. "Mother," cried Noah again, but he feared the loud tone of his anxiety might irk or startle her. His mother, beside the gate, had her back to him but seemed to know at once of his presence there, as she put out a hand to accept his intrusion as if it had been a gift he had tendered. They stood together and watched lights come on singly, tiny metallic gleams all of the same pattern, arranged snugly between loops of the gradually disappearing trees. Lamp glow deepened everywhere, bracketed by window panes which were scarcely to be seen. Noah tasted the sweetness of growing things closing him in the garden with his mother.

Then for some reason, his mood narrowing, he looked on at all this spread out like a feast in front of him and saw little save its vacancy. He wanted to reach out a hand and touch his mother's but still did not dare to: so he laid his palm along the fence where her fingers were resting with the evanescence of anticipated flight. Now her face was not visible and he longed to say something that would strike deftly to where her remoteness from himself began. "Young Gano is going away," he brought out: but was shamed because he realized how he was intruding a private loss upon her suffering. Her response was gentle. "I know," said his mother. "I know it, dear. His aunt telephoned to tell us so. She said particularly she was sorry." Noah felt the words like a hand laid leadenly on his head. "His aunt said she was sorry." As though this made a difference in their cruel separation. "Yes, Gano's sister—the sister, the nun, that is—came for him late today. But it's for some time been pending, you see." Noah remembered Gano as he had been that sunny treacherous afternoon: the way his friend looked, his face splashed by the deep bronze light as

though by copper rain which clung to the flesh, of the gray eyes with their border of young blue veins that ticked at odd circumstances, fearsomely. "Gano knew it was pending," he answered smoothly and exactly hiding the wound. Out of a minor silence his mother said, tautly: "And now they're taking Val—." She conveyed by this, he had no doubt, that Gano's sister was responsible for that, as well.

Inside the house he heard his father and brother descending the stairs. Their tones swarmed along the surface of the door and he feared that they would be coming outside to disturb them in the garden but they went back through the hallway instead. The sound was as of several voices having managed to get off by themselves and babbling in untrammeled freedom over the woodwork. Noah, troubled, asked: "Is Val's twin going to stay?"

"Edward—," his mother replied, almost with sharpness, "your brother, Edward, has been away for a long—," here she drew in her breath, as though in pain, "—for a dreadful long—as they don't always allow them to come back to their loved ones when—if someone should stay away as fearfully long." Noah, listening with exact care to her meaning, could but hopelessly speculate as to the *they* of his mother's words: he wondered whether this might be that identical one that already had Val and Young Gano as additions to a conscience perplexingly burdened. "Will he stay here—here at the Range?" he probed, delicately.

"Yes—. Oh yes." She stooped to his small height to clasp him ferociously about his shoulders: "Edward, dear, will always, always be staying with us here." With eyes so close to his own that Noah was able to sense their unneutral brightness, he suspected her of tears. He lightly touched her arm. It was as though he really had not cared to, for now he had no idea what to do with the sudden emotion she was offering. She whispered, crookedly he felt: "You will be lonely," nor could he deny that he would be, "now—now," his mother added, persuasively, "since they've taken your Gano—and then Val," she persisted, grievously, "will be next—," but it seemed to him that his mother was not so much lamenting, over what stark consequence he could scarcely imagine.

There was even something fraudulent beyond her concern but he was not able to sift it: not though he brought her words up close to the microscope of his interior vision and gleaned it obstinately there. It yielded him momentary distaste like the saccherine mixture of the garden which he caught baldly upon his tongue. He freed himself and shied from her entwining arms.

She kept a precarious balance through clawing at the rails of the fence and then commenced urgently, on her knees, to close up the space between them. She seized him by one elbow but Noah did not retreat again but simply stood still and gazed despairingly off at the darkness enclosing them like so many additional shrubs. His mother's enormous smile was laid indistinctly against his eyelids. "There's your brother. Edward will be lonely, too—there—there's that," she said, her manner desperate and stealthy. He started in to shudder then, wickedly.

A chill blew up and snapped at his unwary limbs. Noah twisted and she dropped his arm as if it had scorched her fingers. It struck him sharply and all at once that not alone had Gano been taken from him but even more destructively his mother was equally lost, each being sacrificed in strips to the artful Edward, along with poor old grinning Silas. All the Range was tinctured with wary lights now, all the normal stars were out, although he, elaborately searching among all of these, was able to decipher nothing from the patterns marked off for his sight. Who had put out the fire? Unwillingly he had thought once again about the doomed rider and the flaming horse that had glowed before their eyes, his and Gano's. And he wondered if, wherever Gano might be, he would see this identical sky and spear its secret with his privy gaze.

Noah, though, did not mean to be churlish and would have spoken gently to his mother, had it not been that his father came out just now from the doorway to call to her where she was huddled in a corner of the garden.

The urgent sound reached them here detached from the whole of him, which was not, of course, visible in so much darkness. His father's abrupt voice said Edward had come downstairs, at last, and was hungry.

A Change of Tense

by Anthony Harrigan

Growing up among people whose roots descend deep
Into the past, I see my father's time as a great pastry
Of ideas that crumbled before it reached my mouth.

Indeed whole streets of history and all the older
Ways have vanished for the public good
A ball of privilege swallowed by new thoughts.

The older words in my mind are like toys scattered
On an attic floor, a magnet and a length of twine
That an infant played with, and in time forgot.

Thus as I look out my soul's unshuttered eye
I realize that love like tables with extra leaves
Can be enlarged beyond one's private dream and world.

That when I had the blinds closed to keep my heart safe
My happiness was equal only to the daylight
That would stream through half-a-dozen broken slats.

So now my mind extends its open palm and touching voice
Among the items that reflect the inner change and
Clear sight that gives us metaphors like wine.

Bread and Circuses

The Italian Stage After Its Liberation

by Herbert Jacobson

Those who expected the Italian theater to use its newly acquired liberty for a concentrated attack on Fascism were doomed to disappointment. Many political satires were produced, and many popular comedians such as Macario and Peppino de Filippo used a great deal of political material. But although several comedies did contain a scene mimicking Mussolini or the ex-Fascisti—*Cantachiaro* (*Chanticleer*) had one showing a rapid return to Fascism of the smart set on a rumor of Mussolini's return—most of the satire dealt with more immediate institutions. For most of the playwrights Fascism was dead, and there was no profit in flaying its ghost. On the other hand the liberation had brought in its train many new problems that cried out for some rough comic handling, and to these they now turned their attention. The common attitude was neatly summed up in De Filippo's song, "Come Fu . . . Come Non Fu" ("How It Was . . . How It Wasn't"), the moral of which is that Giovanni Q. Citizen isn't interested in how things were, but in how they are. It contained the significant lines: "I am not one of those who said: 'We want the stinker (Mussolini) back'."

Political satire was the most widely discussed form of theatrical entertainment, largely because its subjects were also those most discussed outside the theater. But the two apparently most popular plays, *L'Adolescente* (*The Adolescent*) and *L'Affare Kubinski* (*The Kubinski Affair*) were comedies of errors. In dis-

cussing them individually later I shall try to show why this form was natural to a people still suffering from the after-effects of the tragi-comedy of errors that was Fascism.

Before proceeding to the individual productions, however, I must first remind my readers of certain differences of the Italian theater from our own, as well as certain relevant similarities to it. For one thing the phrase "the Italian theater" in liberated Italy meant, by and large, the theatrical productions of Rome, just as "the American theater" means Broadway. Prices are lower than they are even on peacetime Broadway, but, nevertheless, most seats represent several times an *honest* day's wages for the average wage-earner, which limits the audiences pretty much to people who were well-to-do before the liberation or who are getting that way now, some of them on the Black Market. Companies are more or less permanent, generally revolving around a pair of stars such as the Bagni-Cortese or Maltagliati-Cimara combinations. One indirect result of this semi-permanency is that actors tend to type themselves or, at least, be typed by their directors even more than in Hollywood. Runs, even of hits, are much shorter than on the English-speaking stage. The curtailment of movie production occasioned by the war in general and in particular by the destruction of the Cine-Città (Cinema City) near Rome, whose splendid machines were plundered by the Germans, has brought many movie stars into the legitimate theater, not always with felicitous results. However the line between stage and screen was never so strict as it is in America, since in Italy both entertainment institutions had their center in the same city, Rome.

"Cantachiaro"

Cantachiaro was, I believe, the first of the numerous political satires produced after the liberation of Rome, and the best. It was the best not because its satire was intrinsically sounder than that of its successors—it was not—but because it was written, produced, and performed by the best artistic talent. Among other things it was the only show I saw in Italy outside opera where the *décor* added to, rather than detracted from, the rest of the

spectacle. *Cantachiaro*'s sets were constructed under the same shortage of materials as the rest, yet somehow managed to achieve comic distinction. Its verses were also cleverer, although its tunes shared the rather surprising general unmusicality of Italian musical revues. Furthermore, the whole company had an air of eager brightness that recalled Broadway at its best. The remainder of the Italian musicals I saw were, however, characterized by a general sloppiness of production.

The smart pace of *Cantachiaro* was set by its star, the popular Anna Magnani. Whether she snakehips up the aisles singing in *romanesco* dialect about the sex appeal of the American boys, or stands queenly in costume to recite the roll of Italy's ravaged cities, she is always an impressive and moving performer. This sharp-featured, tightly wound actress brings an intensity of expression to her work that can, as she chooses, make her audience cry, or laugh till the tears run down their cheeks.

The show derived its name and writing talent from a new Roman weekly which satirizes everything social from Mussolini to Togliatti, the Communist leader, not excluding Lieutenant General of the Realm Umberto and the Allied Commission. The stage version satirized the usual list of subjects: the food and fuel shortage, the Black Market, the ineffectiveness of the new Italian government, the obtuseness of the Allied Commission, and, as previously noted, the moral vagaries of the Allied soldiers. A key sketch was one in pantomime wherein characters made up as the leaders of the various political parties engage in a weight-lifting contest. Each easily lifts an apparently great weight bearing the name of his particular political panacea, viz., "DEMOCRACY," "JUSTICE," "PROLETARIAT," "PHILOSOPHY," etc. But none of them can budge the seemingly lighter weight labelled "RECONSTRUCTION." In another sketch a character who identifies himself as Colonel "Charlie" Poletti of the AMG patiently listens while various citizens tell him their troubles and then replies to each of them with the same refrain:

"Lo so, lo so. Ma che posso far'?"
"I know, I know. But what can I do?"

A takeoff on Mussolini making a speech was cleverly done, but the audience did not seem to be amused by it. Perhaps it reminded them too much of the real thing.

During a scene in which American MPs are shown putting "For Allies Only" signs on all lovers' lanes, I witnessed an even more memorable scene in the audience. Many eyes were nervously watching the reactions to these anti-Allied cracks of a lone pair of American soldiers among the spectators. But instead of taking offense, as they were apparently expected to do, the two Yanks were laughing at the caricatures of themselves even more heartily than the Italians. At one such guffaw an Italian near me nudged the woman with him, pointed to the soldiers, and said: "Quest' è la vera democrazia!" ("This is the real meaning of democracy!")

Occasionally I felt that too great advantage was taken of this democratic tolerance. In another satire *Ma Dov'è Questo Amore?* (*But Where Is This Love?*) the theme was used of American soldiers first lording it over Italy and then returning to shoeshine and peanut stands in the States. American soldiers were still dying in Italy at the time.

Like the journal after which it was named, *Cantachiaro* suffered from a lack of direction. Swinging at everyone, it managed to hit no one squarely. Satire that is indiscriminately destructive achieves no moral end and, in the last analysis, is not even amusing. To be either entertaining or instructive, satire must proceed from some given standard of values, and this, *Cantachiaro* did not have.

This lack could not have been due to Allied theatrical censorship, since there is none. But it may have been conditioned by a desire of the Italians not to offend their Allied co-belligerents too deeply. Whatever its cause, the lack of a positive point of view ruined not only *Cantachiaro,* but all the other political reviews I saw in Italy.

* * *

Vittorio de Sica

I had the privilege of seeing Vittorio de Sica three times, as the hero in *Tovarich,* as the second lead in *Zazà,* and as one of the principals in the revue *Ma Dov'è Questo Amore?* We have no one in our English-speaking theater to whom this actor-director is quite comparable. He is neither a precocious genius like Orson Welles nor is he a writer like Noel Coward, Ivor Novello, or Emlyn Williams. Yet, like the first two, he creates the impression of being one of the elemental daemons of the theater, around whom other artists are grouped, and from whom they take their measurements. I have never seen any of the films he has directed, but have been assured by persons of trustworthy judgement that he made the best films in a country not noted for superior cinematic production.

De Sica's assets include a clear and well-modulated baritone singing voice and an ability to cavort about a stage, as he does in the vaudeville scene of *Zazà,* so that you think he could dance well if he had to. Maybe he can. He is tall, has distinguished features, and is a good twenty years older than some of his publicity stills, which should put him in his mid-forties. The essence of his acting is a deep respect for the role he is portraying, a characteristic especially rare among the sharply- and thinly-typed Italian actors; and an economy of line even rarer among a people given to comparatively broad gestures both on and off stage.

Apropos was the reaction of the English-speaking Romans who attended the one performance of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* that the Cornell-Aherne company gave for Italian civilians during their tour of the G.I. circuit. Several of my Italian friends who attended it came away puzzled at the great reputations of these two actors. They found the ebullience of Aherne as "Browning" quite natural—and thus missed one of the key points of his characterization. But they could not understand how a man and a woman in love could sit so long in a room without a chaperone and not rush into each other's arms.

The reaction of the Roman audience to De Sica's polished style was a sad illustration of the mediaeval inter-city prejudices that

still divide Italy. Their appreciation was respectful, but begrudging, because this actor has lived most of his life in contemned Naples. I heard several lobby critics remark that his "Prince" in *Tovarich* was stiff and cold (how did they expect a stage prince to behave, loose and hot?), a fine example of Neapolitan philosophical posturing (from Aquinas to Croce, allegedly ignorant Naples has given Italy her great philosophers, while lowly Sicily has produced Pirandello and Verga, Italy's greatest modern playwright and novelist respectively). But when in *Zazà*, playing a vaudeville m.c. in love, De Sica gesticulated broadly at a few points, there were subdued cries of the order: "Ah! That's the vulgar Neapolitan in him!" Few Romans seemed to consider that he might simply be a conscientious and versatile actor doing the right thing by his varied roles. The revue, *Ma Dov'è Questo Amore?*, was graced with three engaging personalities, De Sica, Elsa Merlini, and Umberto Melnati, and a few very funny scenes, yet it did not come off as a show. Its chief weakness was an uncertainty of intention: it started out to be a satire on political revues that left out Love, and wound up neither super-political nor romantic satire.

Signor Melnati, a small elderly character, creates some rare comic effects by a soft-voiced insistence on the propriety of his point of view regardless of the wayward way of the world. The most successful scene in the show was a curtain raiser titled "Due Vecchie Conoscenze" ("Two Old Acquaintances"), in which he, as an aged senator, and De Sica, as a retired colonel, sing about the ephemerality of the various rebuffs to the good old status quo they have witnessed in their time. The burden of their song is that Fascism didn't last, the Allied Commission won't last, and neither will all the new Leftist parties. At their deliberate mispronunciation of the names of Togliatti and Nenni, the Socialist leader, the swank audience roared mightily.

The most moving moment in the revue was another curtain raiser when, with a deliberate Neapolitan accent, De Sica sang "Uno Che Non Vuol Tornare" ("One Who Doesn't Want to Return"), about the destruction of his own "bella Napoli."

The other star of this revue was Elsa Merlini, whose acting is so greatly admired by (Lieutenant Colonel) Thornton Wilder. The possessor of a great reputation as an interpretess of romantic comedy, she was not so fortunate in her material this time. She came into her own only in the heavily ironic sketch, "Visita di Condoglianze" ("Condolence Call"), by Achille Campanile, interpolated into the revue. Elsewhere her piquant smile, dainty gestures and general ability to charm her audience served only to remind them that her lines were beneath her.

In addition to its debilitating ambivalence of intent this revue seemed generally ill-advised in presenting a "prose company," i.e., dramatic actors, in a musical comedy. Only De Sica is at home in both, although Signor Melnati survived the transition better than Signora Merlini.

This show boasted a bi-lingual Italian-English printed program, and one horrible scene in deliberate pigeon English. Both were wasted, since the only Italian spectacle Allied soldiers ever attended in any numbers was the opera, at which they were accustomed to not understanding the language.

Macario

The internationally famous clown, Macario, produced *Moulin Rouge* (*The Red Mill*), a well-received girlie show starring, naturally, himself. In fact it wouldn't have been much without him. The Italian friends who recommended it assured me that he had searched six months for the girls in his line. He could have done much better in six minutes on the Via Veneto at five any evening, when the prostitutes of Rome begin promenading.

The "ladies of Macario" were, with a very few exceptions, the usual hippo-hipped European chorus line, with only the vaguest notion of why they were on stage. It seems a pity that more could not have been done with musical comedy dancing in a city which boasts such a progressive, classical ballet company (the two adjectives are not incompatible) at the Royal Opera Theater, with such superb exemplars as Attilia Radice and the nineteen-year-old prodigy, Ugo dell' Ara. But, then, our own American musical

comedy dancing has only grown up in the past few seasons from the "one-two-three, kick!" stage, and it was leavened by the influence of the modern rather than the classical ballet.

But it was still Macario who made his own show. His gags were occasionally staler and cornier than those of a Chicago night club m.c., yet I found myself laughing, along with the rest of the audience, at the funny little man who pulled them. The secret of his success lies, I suspect, in his comic mask—the Cupid curl, the two high bright spots of rouge, the roll of the eyes—and the general air that *he* is enjoying himself so why should *you* sit there as if you were mad at the world?

Like Peppino de Filippo, Macario engaged in a considerable amount of political gagging; but, unlike his rival, none of Macario's comments were clearly anti-Fascist. Indeed if Mussolini were to have returned to Rome, a spectre that haunted a few otherwise would-be anti-Fascists up to his death, he could have taken no exception to anything Macario had said. This clown avoids, if not evades, the issue by ridiculing the form rather than the substance of politics. For example he has invented his own party—the "*Partito Schifista,*" which can be translated freely as the "Disgusted Party"; they are disgusted with everything, reminiscently of Groucho Marx's refrain, "Whatever it is, I'm against it!" Macario's *Schifismo* may be interpreted in several ways, some of them only apparently contradictory: as hedging through fear of Fascism, as a subtle mocking of the discontented parties of the Left, or as a "plague o' both your houses" for the sake of a laugh. I am inclined to believe the last factor is strongest even though the others may be present in some measure. It places Macario with the rest of the political humorists of the *Cantachiaro* school, i.e., with no special point of view. But he gets away with it where they do not, for technical reasons. He draws laughs where they draw only pictures, because he works the material for laughs, whereas they are all too obviously trying to make political points. Macario is the eternal clown who finds even the tragic political situation comical—along with everything else in life. It is a figure for would-be social satirists to study.

Peppino de Filippo

Unfortunately I could not share the obvious enjoyment of his Roman audience at a large part of the comedy of Peppino de Filippo in *Imputati, Alziamoci* (*Accused, Let Us Arise*) because it was in Neapolitan dialect (not just a Neapolitan accent), which I do not understand. But during the sketches in straight Italian which made up the bulk of his repertoire I could appreciate why he is popular with both the Roman "classes" and those members of the masses who can afford theater tickets. De Filippo, as opposed to Macario, depends on his wit rather than his manner to earn him laughs. He is, however, still a clown, rather than just a gag man, but one of the least dressed-up or made-up clowns in the business. He is a young, good-looking man with a naturally dignified, unaffected air.

This show, written by Michele Galdieri, was perhaps the worst example of a fatal flaw that to a greater or lesser degree appeared in all the Italian musical revues I saw, namely, a lack of rapport between words and music. Not that the verses didn't fit into the rhythm, but that together they didn't sound nearly so funny or relevant as they must have looked on paper. Among other curious features is the habit of stopping the show about once every act to have some minor character explain in quite unhumorous verse what it is all about. Writing for the musical theater calls for a special technique that not all witty poets command. This lack is not a peculiarly Italian one, however.

American Comedies

There were two Italian versions of American comedy hits in Rome which I did not bother to see again, *The Women* and *You Can't Take It With You*. The latter was additionally noteworthy for the reputedly successful debut of Pirandello's granddaughter, Nini, as the ballet dancer. Both plays were having a great vogue. I think it significant that out of the entire corpus of American theatrical literature made available to Italian producers after a five-year block, they should have chosen—and their public approved—two of the most disintegrative plays in our entire theat-

rical history. That Americans have no respect for the family and the home was not news to an Italy that the Fascisti had propagandized for a generation. But such bright confessions of it out of the defendant's mouth may also have served to console Italians for the disintegration of their own home and family lives attendant on the war.

"La Cena Delle Beffe"

In Florence there were very few theatrical performances, and they were very poor. I attended two of them before getting thoroughly discouraged. One was a completely talentless and pointless revue titled *Firenze, Si Sveglia!* (*Florence, Awake!*). Its only point of interest lay in the only bit of public anti-clericalism I came across in all Italy, a sketch about a sick child to whom a miserly priest gives only his blessing, while a poor cabbie gives its mother food and money. The other production was a revival of the modern Florentine verse classic, *La Cena Della Beffe* (*The Supper of Scorns*), by Sem Benelli. Neither the swift movement of the story nor the beauty of the verse came across in this sorry, semi-pro performance. The Florentine public showed its traditional good taste by staying away from both these productions in numbers large enough to fill the theater.

Incidentally there was also a parody of *La Cena Delle Beffe* in *Cantachiaro*. The simultaneous stage revival of this modern classic in Florence and Naples, along with a stage takeoff on it in Rome, in addition to its previous release as a film, struck me as symptomatic. At first glance it might appear that Italians wish to hark back nostalgically from their present nadir to the period of their Renaissance glory, in which the play is set. Yet the play is also informed with a spirit of defeatism, violence, and sadness, and its two chief characters engage in a mutually paranoiac, bloody battle of wits versus strength, wit winning. In these terms the play's current widespread vogue becomes more intelligible as an externalized reflection of some of the darker recesses of contemporary Italy's complex, and sometimes divided, "soul."

Bagni-Cortese

I attended several plays produced by the Bagni-Cortese company, Heaven knows why. They have a taste for old-fashioned triangle plays that would have seemed archaic in the Nineteenth Century French theater, from which indeed some of their pieces seem to have come. As actors they are almost all characterized by a sweet disregard for the script whenever it conflicts with their "types." In the case of Signora Margherita Bagni, who has a capacity for projecting the special sadness of middle-aged wives, this is tolerable; she acts as if she were bringing her troubles straight from the boudoir or bridge table to the stage. But the other types in her company wind up seeming neither people nor artists.

Maltagliati-Cimara

Despite a couple of *fiaschi*, among them Somerset Maugham's pot-boiler, *Lady Frederick*, the Maltagliati-Cimara company had two of the biggest hits in Rome, the two comedies of errors previously referred to.

L'Adolescente by G. Nathanson, although I believe a French work, is good School of Pirandello, based as it is on the proposition that things are only what they seem. When a wealthy man in late middle age discovers that his kept mistress has a penniless but nice young man of good family as a lover, he at first cuts her off. But his need for her simple companionship is so great that he decides to keep her regardless. The young man comes to resent his own position, i.e., indirectly being supported by his mistress' keeper, so the woman and the older man plot to deceive the young one. The climax of the play is when the older man, who is paying the bills, starts to leave by the rear exit on the arrival of his rival. I was informed that Jean Cocteau is among the admirers of this *oeuvre*.

Their other success, *L'Affare Kubinski*, seemed, at first glance, to be School of Molnar. But, on closer examination, it, too, reveals the hydra-head of the School of Pirandello. An unemployed gentleman of more wits than means becomes assistant to the vain,

absentminded president of a big bank by pretending to be his only employee who can recall anything about a non-existent account. The night I attended, the stage lights went out at the beginning of Act III and so did I. Next night, suffering from an acute attack of critic's conscience, I went back to see Act III and discovered I had done better the first time. In the leading role Luigi Cimara had an opportunity rare for an actor of his eternally suave type, namely, a suave part, of which, naturally, he made the most. A really crackling performance was given by Filippo Scelzo as the bank president. Partly by a clever use of the delayed response he painted a memorable portrait of pomposity.

These two plays enjoyed such popularity with audiences and such critical esteem that it is worth while to speculate on the reasons. I have classified both of them as School of Pirandello which adherence I think largely explains their success with Italian audiences. The continuing reign of Pirandello throughout the *Era Fascista* is one of the weightiest factors in Italian cultural life. Even the anti-Fascist exiles arrived in England and America with a set of his works surrounding their annotated *Divina Commedia*. I think there is some correlation between this exaggerated respect for the Sicilian playwright and the attitude of Italian intellectuals toward Fascism in its heyday. Dozens of Italian *letterati* with whom I have talked have almost unanimously volunteered that they are not so guilty as their fanatical German counterparts because they paid only lip service to Fascism, recognizing it for the sham it was. Waiving, for the moment, the question of which is more reprehensible, believing participation or doubting acceptance, I am inclined to believe Italian intellectuals who say they always laughed up their sleeves at Fascism. But for them to live under such a sham for a generation called for a philosophy of shamming that the comic subjectivism of Luigi (*As You Desire Me*) Pirandello neatly afforded. It was all the more necessary since Croce, the professional philosopher, courageously refused to have his idealistic doctrines perverted to Fascist irrationalism by such intellectual apologists for Fascism as Giovanni Gentile. The question now arises: Why should a stage philosophy of the

relativity of reality still be the most popular with critics and public after the liberation of Rome from Fascism? The answer is, I fear, that until the country is reunited under its own government once more, that government, the center of Italian hopes for a new Risorgimento, is still unreal.

About The Contributors

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Footsteps on the Stairs

by Tamara Loundine

JEANNE sat up in bed her heart pounding: there were footsteps on the stairs. Heavy footsteps . . . were they coming for her, those footsteps? They dragged up the stairs, stopped, went on again. Heavy footsteps . . . Now they were in front of her door. Jeanne pressed her hand to her heart which was beating so hard she had the impression it was shaking the bed springs.

She heard, as though through a layer of cotton, the noise of keys, then the neighbor's door opened. The door banged.

Jeanne let herself fall back on the pillow. For a moment she lay motionless. Then she stretched out her hand toward the lamp by her bed and turned on the light. Although the glare hurt her eyes she did not close them, but began looking around her room at the familiar objects. She felt a little better and smiled, a shadow of a smile that made her seem younger, almost a child. . . . It was really stupid to be so scared. It had been going on for almost two years now, these accesses of anguish. She did not try to deceive herself. The minute she was alone terror gripped her; she tried to get the better of it, to reason with herself. It was no use; panic took her by the throat. Each footstep on the stairs made her start, and she would think: "Is it for me? Are they coming for me this time?"

She never slept now. She would listen, listen . . . She listened to the silence of the house, to the cricket somewhere over by the window. Sometimes there was the shriek of a train whistle, and the siren too, and the planes and the bombs. But she wasn't afraid

of the war and its train. She was afraid of the footsteps. When she realized that they were her neighbor's steps, she would hide her head under the covers like a child, and would try to persuade herself that life was beautiful. In order to convince herself she would think of vacations in the past, at the seashore or in the mountains; of those mornings that were cool and warm at the same time, of the salt water and the soft sand. She would think of her love and of the strength it gave her. It was for her lover that she went on living. But she hid her fears from him. She would smile when she was with him and pretend to scorn danger, and then, when she was alone, she would hide her head under the covers. At night she would wait for the morning, and when morning came she would begin waiting for the night. There were moments when she even played with the idea of flight. But where could she go? Everywhere it was the same. Besides, even to live in this constant anguish was better than being separated from her lover. Away from him, it seemed to her, life would be unendurable.

Jeanne contemplated the pictures on her walls. She looked at the figure of a saint by one of the old masters. Its perfection of form gave her a moment of solace, and she began to speculate on the serenity of the art of the past and the agonized uncertainty of art today. . . .

Her eyes burned . . . Oh, how she longed to sleep! To sleep, to have the right to sleep. She was utterly played out. . . .

She took a cigarette. Her lighter flared. The whites of her eyes shone. The dark hollows in her cheeks made her face look like that of an unhappy little girl. Still sitting up in bed, her shoulders leaning against the wall, she fell asleep. . . . Carried along on a violet cloud, she saw the terrestrial globe beneath her, green, russet, blue, gray. She understood: the green patches were the meadows and the forests; the russet ones were earth; the blue ones the sea, and the gray ones were the cities of human beings. She saw men running about in a state of agitation; and on the plain, with weapons in their hands, men were rushing at each other yelling. There were flames, the booming of cannons; men

were falling, their arms flung into the air, their mouths open in a last cry. Sinister silence.

The cloud floated on. She could see a town, a big city. The gates stood open, and men, women and children streamed out. Behind them a pack of mad dogs, a pack of mad people throwing stones at the men, the women and the children. Heads bent, they went away, and the women's sobs mingled with the barking of the dogs and the yelling of the mob. Submissively they went away along the highroad. They did not resist. They did not defend themselves. They went away. It was long, the road, so long, and far away at the end of it there was another city. They knocked at the gates. But no one let them in. They came to the seashore. Flags of different nations floated from the masts. The gang-plank was down. And the women and the men and the children fell on their knees, their hands clasped in silent prayer. Then they went on board. The ship sailed for days and days, and it put in at an island. But the inhabitants of the island refused to let the passengers of the ship land. Again it sailed for months and months, and for years and years. Nowhere was there a welcome for this wandering flock. The children grew into men, and they knew nothing of the world but the water and the sky and the closed gates of cities.

Then one day the ship foundered, and only a few of its occupants survived, their faces streaming with the salt water of the sea and the salt water of their tears.

The violet cloud floated on.

Jeanne leaned over farther and farther. Her head struck against the wall, and she woke up with a start as though coming out of a faint.

It seemed to her that she had been asleep for ages. . . . But her cigarette was still burning. She stared at it vacantly. . . . The cricket was chirping, and Jeanne thought of the velvet depths of the wonderful June night surrounding her, and that to her was forbidden. . . .

The cricket suddenly stopped chirping. . . . There were footsteps coming up the stairs. Heavy footsteps. Many footsteps.

Jeanne sat up. The footsteps approached her door—footsteps in heavy boots—and stopped.

Her bell began ringing furiously.

Then Jeanne gave a poor little smile.

"Now," she murmured, "I can sleep at last."

(Translated by Louise Varèse)

Two Poems *by John Nerber*

LANDFALL

To walk, delight in, feel the deed
Fall from a heaven of mist and fog,
The half-world of wet countryside, given
Death's barn, its aged cattle
To drive homeward with the aggressor dog
To the painted byres and ricks of heaven.

But to walk, delight in, feel the deed
Fall, the slow deliberate footstep
Fall amid counties of living grass,
Pressed through the green by the grey
Monotone of the falling rain
Through the gates of your nature, home.

My name is legion, but my forces few;
These forces drive me homeward, drive
Through levels of a human mist
My era's individual man,
A face by instinct turned toward home
Warmed by its constant private sun.

Though grey waves rocking loll my head
Shifting, sleepless on its bed,
The inward anguish gropes toward home,
Sees flowers in the cresting foam,
Sees house, the wood, the tiny spring
Whispering to the air your name.

So I must see you everywhere apart
The pulse beat of my bated heart,
The deed of life to me once given
Which now, though separate, must govern;
You, who seas and continents away,
Loom larger than the dark bulk of an island.

LETTERS IN EXILE

These syllables whose liquid forms your wax,
Vowels of the free and easy-breathing air,
Your name, I lash with withe in willow water
To stir up you your image in my weir:

I cut my diamond on a natural glass:
Square is that view of chimneys and old brick,
And every inch an effort of the past,
So strong the impulse of the threshing stick:

And I must float awhile upon this leaf
(The infant vessel of my love for you)
And trace the thin web of your spider track
Across the halyards of my growing view:

And I must drift and live and love
Though love lies stretched across subsiding water,
And seethe beneath and love and sing
The praise of you, old Adam's roaring daughter.

V. An Edwardian Satirist*

by John Jamieson

From the eighteen nineties until his death in 1920, Howard Overing Sturgis, a wealthy American who had lived in England since childhood, was a member of the highly cultivated and rather sheltered circle of the English and American men and women of letters of which Henry James was the chief luminary. Rhoda Broughton, Edith Wharton, A. C. and E. F. Benson, and, in a younger generation, Percy Lubbock and Gerard Hopkins, the translator and essayist—these are the best-known names. They were all able writers although only James produced the kind of work, both in quality and extent, on which major reputations are based. In this group Sturgis was celebrated for his hospitality and his wit and for an elusive charm that baffled even James's analytical powers. His reference to "Howard in his infinite Howardism" is a humorous evasion, and the pages which Percy Lubbock and Edith Wharton have devoted to Sturgis are almost equally tantalizing. Although he met him only once, E. M. Forster's essay on Sturgis in *Abinger Harvest* conveys a clearer impression of his personality than the memoirs of his intimate friends. He describes him as painstakingly *neat* in all he said and did (characteristically, his hobby was needlework); and underneath the suave surface of his manner there was a little sardonic edge that Forster, then a self-conscious young novelist, found rather disconcerting. George Santayana, a remote

* This is the fifth in a series of articles dealing with writers who are less well known here than they deserve to be.

relative of Sturgis,' has devoted some interesting pages to him in *The Middle Span.* His description of Sturgis in his young manhood as "a perfect young lady of the Victorian type" enables us to see more clearly the autobiographical element in Sturgis' principal novel. It is evident that there was a good deal of Sturgis himself in the puritanical and rather ladylike protagonist of *Belchamber.*

During the nineties Sturgis published two interesting but rather slight essays in fiction—*Tim* and *All That Was Possible. Belchamber,* a much bigger work in all ways, appeared in England in 1904 and in America the following year. Highly praised by a few critics and damned by many more, it failed to attract the general public, and since Sturgis wrote no more, it came perilously near being forgotten altogether. It was remembered by Sturgis' friends, however, and Edith Wharton's *A Backward Glance,* published in 1934, contained an enthusiastic appreciation of the novel. In 1935 it was reissued in the Oxford "World's Classics" series.

One can readily understand why *Belchamber* fell so quickly into oblivion forty years ago. A sardonic portrayal of the English aristocracy of the nineties, it violated the most stringent literary taboo of the day by dealing openly with a painful sexual problem. An unsophisticated young man is duped into marriage with a woman who refuses to sleep with him and betrays him with another man, by whom she has a child. This is the central situation of the novel. It was obviously doomed to failure in a period when *The Wings of the Dove* was criticized for its "unpleasant" implications and the reticent author of *The House of Mirth* was charged with "dredging her texts out of the cesspools of vice."

The hero, "Sainty," sixth Marquis and eleventh Earl of Belchamber, is an earnest, rather effeminate young man who likes books and serious talk and has an instinctive aversion to fashionable life, women and sports. As a university fellow or Fabian social worker he might have been of some use to the world, but the chance of birth has made him a lord and the pressure of circumstances which he is too weak to resist forces him to live like one. As a boy he must ride, with fear in his heart, until he is perma-

nently lamed by a fall from his horse. As a young man he must abandon the pursuits that attract him at Cambridge and devote himself to the management of his estate. When he begins to find unexpected compensations in this activity, his peace is again shattered by events which he cannot control. To save the estate from the consequences of his younger brother's elopement with a chorus girl, he is inveigled half-willingly into marriage with a woman who despises him. By the time that his wife bears another man's child, Sainty has become so miserably compromised by the falsity of his situation that he accepts the child as his own. In less than a year it dies, and at the same time his wife's lover abandons her to make a wealthy marriage. Sainty is left bound to a woman he loathes, with the knowledge that the beautiful estate of Belchamber, in spite of all his shifts, will fall into the hands of his barbarous sister-in-law after his death. He has been bullied and tricked into abandoning the last shreds of his self-respect in order to meet the demands of his position in life, and it has all been for nothing.

Even in a brief summary, it is evident that *Belchamber* has one serious flaw. The contrast between Sainty's earnest idealism and the grossness, insincerity and narrowness of the people who surround him is calculated to show the destructive effect of a frivolous society on a spirit that is too fine for it. But since Sainty himself is presented as helplessly irresolute and cowed in every situation, the contrast loses much of its force. The author lets fall a few hints that latent homosexuality may be at the bottom of Sainty's unresisting acceptance of his unfitness for marriage and for living as he might choose, but this theme is not developed. On the one hand, we have a rather inconclusive study of a moral coward, of a man who "started in life without that crowning gift . . . a good conceit of himself"; and on the other, a penetrating satire on the social class to which the man belongs. The two themes tend to conflict rather than to support each other, and in the long run it is the satire that holds our attention.

Sturgis wrote of the same social world that Thackeray described, and he writes of it in much the same spirit but without the

compromises that Thackeray made a little to willingly with the taste of his readers. It is a world in which the only moral qualities certain of reward appear to be undeviating self-interest and callous disregard for the rights and feelings of others, and the only rewards that matter are wealth and sensual indulgence. Its great exemplar is Sainty's grandmother, old Lady Belchamber, later the Duchess of Sunborough:

> Through long years which converted her contemporaries into invalids or grandmothers, in which her husband grew fat and coarse, and took to drink and low company . . . in which her grandsons were born and her son died she remained always "the beautiful Lady Belchamber," always in the world, and of the world, immutably "gay," and fast, and frivolous, following the same dreary round of fashionable existence year in and year out, bedizened in jewels not always virtuously come by, dressed and head-dressed in the latest mode, and absorbed in the newest craze or pastime with women who might have been her daughters and men who were sometimes the sons of her early lovers.

In portraying this society Sturgis has made brilliant use of Sainty as an observer. Sainty's brother, Arthur, is not merely a young rake making a fool of himself whom we are invited to observe with detached amusement; we see his folly through the eyes of a man whose life is being ruined by it. The dissipated old Duchess of Sunborough chats at dinner of her taste in scent, of baccarat, and the liberties a young woman may allow herself (". . . afterwards, *je ne dis pas*; but before marriage a girl cannot be too careful"). It is a mordant satirical sketch, but that is only half its significance. The Duchess is conversing with her appalled grandson; in due time he will marry, and she will take his pretty wife under her wing. She is presented as a grotesque old woman, amusing in a hard way, like a figure in an Arno cartoon; but in Sainty's life she must be purely a force for evil. No moral judgment is expressed. It is implicit in the situation.

Belchamber abounds in touches like these. It is a ripely meditated novel, and not one of its urbane and unhurried sentences is wasted. Every scene contributes richly to the development of the story and the delineation of the characters, and there is no repetition of effects. Sturgis is reminiscent of Thackeray both in

style and in narrative technique, but he far excelled his master in artistic economy. Too many passages in Thackeray repeat an effect (the asininities of Colonel Newcome are a classic example) or point a moral when neither repetition nor explanation is necessary; we know that they are simply thrown in gratuitously to bring the monthly stint to the required length. Sturgis' creative power was slighter but within its limits he used it to better advantage.

The description in *Vanity Fair of* George Osborne's room when his father and his widow entered it ten years after his death, is well known:

> Some of his clothes, papers, handkerchiefs, whips and caps, fishing-rods and sporting gear, were still there. An army list of 1814, with his name written on the cover, a little dictionary he was wont to use in writing, and the Bible his mother had given him, were on the mantelpiece; with a pair of spurs, and a dried inkstand covered with the dust of ten years. Ah! since that ink was wet, what days and people had passed away! The writing book, still on the table, was blotted with his hand.

In *Belchamber* there is a pasage that calls this of Thackeray's to mind and in a small way illustrates the difference between the great Victorian and his Edwardian disciple. After his brother's elopement Sainty rearranged his living quarters at Belchamber.

> . . . But Arthur's chamber was left by a tacit agreement as it had always been, and sometimes Sainty would wander in there and look disconsolately on the sporting prints, the school groups, the faded blue cap dangling from a nail, the old Eton bureau decorated by a red-hot poker with its owner's name, a very large "Chamb" and a very small "ers," owing to the artist's miscalculation of the space at his command.

The passage in *Vanity Fair* is deliberately and effectively sentimental. It evokes the feelings that anyone might have on entering the room of any young man several years after his death, and there it stops. The sentence in *Belchamber* has the same nostalgic tone, but we are not allowed to forget the nature of the man himself in the luxury of regretting him. The detail of the very large "Chamb" and the very small "ers" branded on the bureau unobtrusively symbolizes the career of Arthur Chambers, and the

comment on the artist's miscalculation is the author's final judgment on his character.

Sturgis wrote at a time when the careless, rambling technique of the Victorian novelists was being superseded by the more consciously artistic methods and the carefully impersonal style of the continental masters. He showed the new feeling for form and point of view and unity of tone while still retaining the more personal manner of the Victorians and their predecessors. Something went out of English fiction when the impersonality of James and Moore became the accepted manner—a certain easy naturalness, as of good talk. The tightening of structure and general improvement in craftsmanship more than compensated for the loss, to be sure; yet it is a question whether Thackeray's and Trollope's personal comments and interpolated summaries of events are any more tedious or inartistic than those impersonally recorded meditations of a Soames Forsyte or a Mr. Chips that are plainly introduced to express the author's own views on life and the state of the world. *Belchamber* demonstrated that the Thackerayan manner, used with restraint, was not incompatible with the new standards of technique. It was an original and brilliantly written novel, and its sardonic panorama of *fin de siècle* society is still unsurpassed. It was a remarkable achievement and it has been unduly neglected.

Chimera

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